

JAYANTABHATTA AND THE VEDAS*

By

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For many years it was my privilege to know Dr. I. J. S. Taraporewala as a great Vedic scholar who had the rare ability to approach Vedic problems with a very thorough Avestan back-ground. He had read carefully much of what I have written about the Veda and offered me very valuable advice from time to time. To this Volume dedicated to his memory I can do no better than offer a paper which, were he alive, would have brought me his learned comments.

Professedly the *Nyāyamañjarī* of Jayantabhatta is only a gloss (*vṛtti*) on select Nyāya aphorisms of Gautama, but it is really an independent treatise whose object is to establish the supremacy of the Nyāya view in contemporary thought. As a result the work takes upon an encyclopaedic character and may even be looked upon as a sort of medieval history of Indian Religion and philosophy.

An early aphorism¹ of Gautama is Jayantabhatta's opportunity to expound some of his very valuable views on Vedic literature. It is not possible to consider all these views within the length of the present paper. I select for consideration now only two of them, the one concerned with the authorship of the Veda and the other with the place of the *Atharva* among the four Vedas.

Now, the authorship of the Vedas is one of those subjects where opinion is sharply divided between modern scholars and those that go by the name of traditionalists; the latter believe that the Vedas have really no author at all and, if each hymn or group of hymns is associated with the name of a *Rṣi*, it is only because that particular *Rṣi* 'saw' or 'discovered' it; according to the former, 'seeing or discovering' a hymn is only a euphemism for 'composition' and the Veda, as an aggregate of the compositions of a large number of *Rṣis*, is of collective authorship.

* In a summarized form this paper was submitted to the XVIII All-India Oriental Conference, Chidambaram, December 1955. The following abbreviations are used by me in this paper:—

AV	= Atharvaveda	NS	= Nyāya Sūtras of Gautama
Ch.Up.	= Chāndogya Upaniṣad	RV	= Rgveda
GPB	= Gopatha Brāhmaṇa	SB	= Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa
MB	= Vyākaraṇa Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali	TB	= Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa
MMS	= Mīmāṃsā Sūtras of Jaimini	TS	= Taittirīya Saṃhitā
MN	= Mahānārāyaṇa Upaniṣad	VP	= Viṣṇu Purāṇa
MS	= Manu Smṛti	VS	= Vaiśeṣika Sūtras of Kaṇāda
NM	= Nyāyamañjarī of Jayantabhatta	YS	= Yājñavalkya Smṛti.

1. *Nyāyasūtra*, I.1.7.

Jayantabhaṭṭa, as a true Naiyāyika, is naturally as averse as the modern scholar to the theory of the authorlessness of the Veda, a theory which, to him, has its origin only in the fancy of the Mimāṃsakas. It is Jayantabhaṭṭa's firm view that, as a verbal composition, the Veda must have an author and in this respect it cannot be different from any other literary work (*Vaidikyo racanāḥ kartṛpūrvikāḥ racanātvaḥ laukikaracanāvat*).² If the Mimāṃsaka would have³ that the Veda, as a text orally learnt from a teacher (*gurvadhyayanapūrvaka*) is really beginningless (*anādi*), it can be pointed out that the case of the Mahābhārata is not different. If the Mahābhārata has its author in Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana alias Pārāśarya, so has the Veda in Prajāpati. Prajāpati cannot be distinguished as an invisible author because no one alive now nor any of his immediate ancestors has ever seen Dvaipāyana:⁴

अथ प्रणेता वेदस्य न दृष्टः केन चित्क चित् ।
द्वैपायनोऽपि किं दृष्टो भवत्पितृपितामहैः ॥

And it is no valid reason to adduce to say⁵that the Veda cannot have an author as no one remembers him (*asmaryamāṇakartṛkatva*). Is it ever conceivable asks Jayantabhaṭṭa,⁶that there can exist, by itself, an arrangement of words without a human agency ? :

न हि पुरुषमन्तरेण क चिदक्षरविन्यासो दृष्टः ।
भो भगवन्तः सम्याः क्वेदं दृष्टं क वा श्रुतं लोके ॥
यद्वाक्येषु पदानां रचना नैसर्गिकी भवति ॥
यदि स्वाभाविकी वेदे पदानां रचना भवेत् ।
पटे हि हन्त तन्तूनां कथं नैसर्गिकी न सा ॥

As an arrangement of words, there can be no difference between *Śam no devir abhiṣṭaya* on the one hand and *Nārāyaṇam namaskṛtya* or *Asty uttarasyāṁ diśi devatātmā* on the other. If, inspite of all these arguments, the Mimāṃsakas still see a speciality in the Vedic sentence and adduce the reputation (*yasas*) they enjoy among the orthodox, the Naiyāyika can only say he can find no valid reason for this preposterous theory :

मीमांसका यशः पिबन्तु पयो वा पिबन्तु बुद्धिजाड्यापनयनाय
ब्राह्मीधृतं वा पिबन्तु वेदस्तु पुरुषप्रणीत एव नात्र भ्रान्तिः ॥

As a text the Veda may have a special status as compared with the *Mahābhārata* or *Kumārasambhava*. To maintain this status it is not at all necessary for the Veda to be authorless; a *special* work can have a *special* author (*yad*

2. NM., I. 213.

3. *Ibid.*, I.214.

4. NM., I. 214.

5. *Ibid.*, I. 215 f.

6. *Ibid.*, I. 216.

*vilakṣaṇeyam racanā tad vilakṣaṇa eva kartā'numīyatām).*⁷ Even in the case of popular works whose authors are known, each work has its own distinctive value. Soaked in honey, smeared with the cool paste of the sandal and pulverized by the rays of the Moon are the sweet words of Kālidāsa⁸ :

अमृतेनेव संसिक्षाश्चन्दनेनेव चर्चिताः ।
चन्द्रांशुभिरिवोद्घृष्टाः कालिदासस्य सूक्त्यः ॥

And Bāṇa bewitches all other poets by his sparkling words arrayed dexterously so as to yield rich meaning suiting each particular context (*prakaṭarasā-nuguna* *vi* *kāṣṭā* *ra* *ca* *nācā* *ma* *kā* *ri* *ta* *sa* *ka* *la* *ka* *vi* *kulā* *bāṇasya* *vācāḥ*).⁹

If, like Pāṇini or Piṅgala, this special author is not also well-known, it is either because of the extreme antiquity of the composition of the veda (*Vedakaraṇakā-lasyātidavīyastvāt*) or of the peculiarity of the body of this being as compared with that of all ordinary human beings (*sakalapuruṣa* *vilakṣaṇatvāt*). But His existence cannot be denied for He is known by Inference (*Anumāna*) and Verbal Testimony (*Āgama*).¹⁰ Even as the weaver can be inferred by looking at the cloth woven by him, so is the author of the Veda known by looking at it:¹¹

पटादिरचनां हृष्ट्वा तस्य चेत्साऽनुमीयते ।
वेदेऽपि रचनां हृष्ट्वा कर्तृत्वं तस्य गम्यताम् ॥

Since a composition like the Veda can be the work only of an omniscient (*Sarvajña*) Person, this author is no other than God (*Iśvara*) who created elements like the Earth (*yenaiva kartrā prthivyādikāryam nirmitam*).¹² And even as Iśvara could create the entire variegated Universe single-handed, so did He compose all the four Vedas, Rg, Yajus, Sāma and Atharva, which are all concerned with the same religious act (*Karma*)¹³:

कर्ता या एव जगतामविलात्मवृत्ति-
कर्मप्रपञ्चपरिपाकविचित्रताज्ञः ।
विश्वात्मना तदुपदेशपराः प्रणीता-
स्तेनैव वेदरचना इति युक्तमेतत् ॥

To those who would accept the authority of the Vedas but make an exception¹⁴ in the case of the *Atharvaveda* on the ground that it is outside the pale of the

7. NM., I. 216.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*, p. 217 f.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

12. NM., I. 218-219.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 220.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 231 f.; for elaboration on this point see H. G. Narahari, *Indian Culture*, 1940, VI. 369 ff.

Trayī, a group recognised both by *Sruti*¹⁵ and *Smṛti*¹⁶, Jayantabhaṭṭa would point out that their attitude is wholly improper; when Jaimini¹⁷ propounded the infallibility of the Vedas or when both Kaṇāda¹⁸ and Akṣapāda¹⁹ made a similar declaration they meant all the *four* Vedas; the Mimāṃsakas cannot say that the Atharvaveda is not authoritative because it is of known authorship; nor can the Naiyāyikas hold, in a similar way, that only the *three* Vedas are the pronouncements of an *Āpta*, not the Atharvaveda also.

Further, there are a number of passages²⁰ in the *Sruti* as well as *Smṛti* which recognise the importance of the Atharvaveda. The TS.²¹ refers to the Atharvaveda saying : “*Tvām agne puṣkarād adhy atharvā nir amanthata.*” The SB.²² contains the statement “*So'�am ātharvano vedah.*” And the Ch. Up.²³ says that Atharvan is the *fourth* Veda (*ātharvanāḥ caturthah*). To the MS.²⁴ the Atharvaveda is as much a *Sruti* as any of the three other Vedas. When the YS.²⁵ mentions the fourteen branches of Knowledge (*vidyāsthānāni*), it takes into account *four* Vedas, not merely *three*. The VP.²⁶ is more explicit when it mentions the four Vedas (*vedāḥ catvārah*) in the course of its enumeration of the varieties of knowledge (*Vidyā*).

Certain traditional writers of eminence like Patañjali and Śabara seem to step aside from the general group which looks upon the Atharvaveda with disfavour; in citing samples from the four Vedas, the former cites²⁷ first from the Atharvaveda ; and Śabara cites often²⁸ from the *Maudaka* and the *Paippalāda* śākhās of the Atharvaveda.

Nor can it be maintained that the AV. teaches not the sacrificial cult that is the main theme of the three other Vedas and that it consequently deserves its divorce from the pale of the *Trayī*. In the performance of sacrificial rites like *Iṣṭi*, *Paśu*, *Ekāha*, *Ahīna* and *satra* the teachings of this Veda have seldom been

- 15. RV., X.90.9 ; TB., III.12.9.1 ; SB., X.5.8.1-3 ; MN., XII. 2.
- 16. MS., III. 145.
- 17. MMS., I. 1.5.
- 18. VS., I. 1.3.
- 19. NS., II.1.67.
- 20. For an enumeration of all passages cited by the NM in this connection, see H. G. Narahari, *Indian Culture*, VI. 371 ff.
- 21. III. 5.11.3a.
- 22. cited by NM., *loc. cit.*
- 23. VII.7.
- 24. XI.33.
- 25. I.3.
- 26. III.6. 28.
- 27. MB., p. 5 (Benares Edn.) ; Patañjali's partiality to the Atharvaveda is further evidenced by the fact that he cites almost exclusively from this Veda and its ancillary texts. It is a fact that is familiar to Sanskrit grammarians that Pāṇini favours the Rgveda, Kātyāyana, the Yajur-veda and Patañjali the Atharvaveda. Patañjali's leaning towards the AV. is sometimes taken to signify that he is an Atharvavedin ; if this is true, there is greater reason to regard Jayantabhaṭṭa as an Atharvavedin since his favour to the AV. is, as the present paper shows, quite explicit.
- 28. On Jaimini, MMS., I. 1. 27 ; II. 4. 2.

neglected. There is no sacrificial rite that can proceed unless the different shades of opinion found in the different Śākhās are taken into consideration.²⁹

It may, however, be argued that the AV. need not be consulted as the *Hotṛ* priest is expected to be proficient in the R̄gveda, the *Adhvaryu* in the Yajurveda and the *Udgāṭṛ* in the Sāmaveda when rites like the Soma-sacrifice are performed. But it is necessary to remember that the Brahmā-priest must consult the AV. so that he may be able to perform his duties (*atharvavedena brahmatvasya karaṇāt*)³⁰ In the GPB³¹ it is stated that Prajāpati employed four priests, the *Hotṛ*, knowing the R̄gveda, the *Adhvaryu*, knowing the Yajurveda, the *Udgāṭṛ*, knowing the Sāmaveda, and the *Brahman*, knowing the Atharvaveda, when he performed the Soma-sacrifice, and that, if any one of these four priests is omitted the sacrifice will be faulty (*yajño riṣyati*). Elsewhere³² in the same Brāhmaṇa it is stated that if, in a sacrifice, anything should go wrong, that can be remedied by the Atharvaveda (*yajñe yad ūnam ca viriṣṭam ca yātayāmām ca karoti tad atharvaṇām tejasā āpyāyayati*) and that the Brahmā-priest can do this by virtue of his knowledge of this Veda.³³

All these practices cannot be dismissed as special to the followers of the AV. with which the followers of the *Trayi-vidyā* have nothing to do. For the *Trayi-vidyā* is nothing more than the *Rg*, *Yajus* and *Sāma* put together; and since the AV. contains passages from all these three Vedas, it has the right to be the text of the *Brahman* in a sacrifice. Should it, however, be argued that there is no necessity for a whole the parts of which can subsist separately, the reply is that the AV. is not a mere compilation of the other Vedas, but contains in it the essence of all of them (*trayyāḥ śukram bhavati*)³⁴ and as such cannot be replaced ; it is for this reason that it is often³⁵ called the *Brahma-Veda*, the Veda of the *Brahmā-priest*.

As for the claims of the *Atharva* for the name *Veda*, there is enough evidence even in ordinary parlance;³⁶ when one classifies the Vedic literature into *Samhitā* and *Brāhmaṇa*' he understands the AV. also by the first division; also if a man says that he has studied the Atharvaveda among the Vedas, none of his hearers blame him for giving the appellative *Veda* to the AV. True, the science of medicine (*Āyurveda*) is also called a *Veda*; but the subject-matter of the AV. is akin to that contained in the other *Samhitās* and, like any of them, it also treats of *Brahma-yajña* and other *Śrauta* rites.³⁷ Yājñavalkya,³⁸ for instance, says that the brahmin

29. NM., I. 234 ff.

30. *Ibid.*,

31. I. 2.24.

32. cited in NM., p. 235.

33. GPB., pp. 106 ff. (Bibliotheca Indica Edn.).

34. NM., I. 236.

35. GPB., I. 2.16.

36. NM., I. 237.

37. *Ibid.*

38. YS., I. 1.44.

who studies the Atharvāṅgiras satisfies the gods with fat (*medas*) and the manes with honey and clarified butter (*pitṛnś ca madhusarpibhyām*.)

It is thus evident that, as a work the authority of which is to be acknowledged, as a Vedic text which is useful for self-study (*svādhyāya*) and finally, as an instrument to secure the *summum bonum* of life, the AV. is on a par with any other text in the Vedic canon (*tena pramāṇatāyām vedasvādhyāyasābdavācyate puruṣārthaśādhanavidhāv api catvārah samā vedāḥ*).³⁹ If it is necessary to make any distinction among the Vedas, the first place must perforce go to the AV. which contains⁴⁰ the great *mantra* with which Brahman performed his primeval *prapava*. Also, while those initiated according to the AV. are at liberty to study any one of the other Vedas, others, who have not gone through Atharvavedic initiation, have no right to study the AV.⁴¹

In reality, there is nothing like a private or an exclusive rite of a single Veda, for each single rite is based on the authority of all the branches of the Vedic canon. It is only those who are not afraid of the consequence of scoffing at a Vedic text that would think of making distinctions therein (*pr̥thak karaṇām vedanindāprāyaścittanirbhayadhiyām eva cetasi parisphurati*).⁴² Four are the branches of the Vedic tree, each one having numerous offshoots, radiant with countless flowers and fruits whose extremely sweet juice is drunk deeply by the eager mouth of the priestly singer⁴³ :

चतुःस्कन्धोपेतः प्रथितपृथगर्थरवयवैः
कृतान्योन्यश्लेषैरुपचितवपुर्वदविऽपः ।

प्रतिस्कन्धं शाखाफलकुमुमसंदर्भसुभगा :
प्रकाशन्ते तस्य द्विजमुखनिपीतोत्तमरसा : ॥

- 39. NM., I. 237.
- 40. GPB., I. 2.16.
- 41. NM., *loc. cit.*
- 42. NM., I. 239.
- 43. *Ibid.*